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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LIBREVILLE 000344

SIPDIS

AF/C FOR LISA KORTE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/23/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR GB

SUBJECT: GABON: VOTER REGISTRATION CLOSED, MINISTER OF STATE OYE MBA RESIGNS TO JOIN LONG LIST OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

REF: LIBREVILLE 00336

Classified By: Ambassador Eunice Reddick for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Voter registration for Gabon's upcoming presidential election ended on July 22 after being extended an extra day due to higher-than-expected demand. Long lines and early closings of registration offices have fueled complaints by citizens and political opponents to the ruling party. Casimir Oye Mba, Minister of State in charge of Mines, Petroleum, and Hydrocarbons resigned from the Democratic Party of Gabon (PDG) on July 21 and announced his presidential candidacy as an independent. Oye Mba is the latest in a string of high-level defections from the PDG. Newly-appointed Prime Minister Biyoghe Mba shuffled the government to fill positions vacated by ministers who are independent candidates. Minister of Defense Ali Bongo Ondimba retained his portfolio. Vice President Didjob Di Ndinge, leader of the ADERE party, publicly announced he would not seek the presidency despite &pressure8 from his supporters. The official list of candidates is expected to be released by July 24. END SUMMARY.

VOTER REGISTRATION CLOSED AFTER EXTENSION

¶2. (SBU) The demand to register to vote in Gabon, especially Libreville, was unexpectedly high. Originally schedule for 7 days, the Minister of Interior extended the registration an extra day) concluding the process on July 22. In 2005 there were an estimatd 727,000 registered voters. That number is expected to increase by at least 200,000 for the upcoming presidential elections.

¶3. (C) Irregularities regarding the voter lists are already starting to appear. Two opposition parties, the Gabonese People's Union (UPG) and the Socialist Party of Gabon (PSG) both demanded that the Ministry of Interior extend the registration period another full week since many voters did not have the opportunity to wait through the long lines at local municipal offices. Embassy contacts tell us there are complaints of registration closing early at offices catering to communities likely to vote for the opposition, waiting crowds of registrants being summarily dismissed, and of supporters of the PDG getting preferential treatment. At least one registration office in a Libreville suburb did not open on the additional day. Citizens of the community barricaded part of a main road to demonstrate their anger.

LIST OF CANDIDATES EXPECTED

14. (SBU) Registration is also completed for perspective presidential candidates. As part of the process, prospective candidates had to pay a fee of 5 million CFA (approximately 10,000 dollars), pass a medical exam, and prove their sole nationality is in Gabon. As of now, there are 15 publicly declared candidates, with the official count expected to be closer to 30. CENAP, the national election commission, will publish the full list of candidates on July 24.

OYE MBA BREAKS FROM THE PDG) VP STAYS

15. (SBU) Casimir Oye Mba, former Minister of State and Minister for Mines, Petroleum and Hydrocarbons declared his candidacy on July 21. He resigned from the PDG and his governmental positions the same day. Oye Mba was a senior member of the PDG. Oye Mba follows former Prime Minister Eyeghe Ndong, and former Minister of Interior Mba Obame in declaring his candidacy as an independent.

16. (SBU) Vice President of the Republic Didjob Di Ndinge announced in state-controlled media that he will not run for the presidency. He said that his supporters from the Democratic and Republican Alliance (ADERE) party were pressuring him to follow Oye Mba and Eyeghe Ndong to resign from the PDG and government and run for president.

NEW GOVERNMENT FORMED - AGAIN

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17. (SBU) Newly appointed Prime Minister Paul Biyoghe Mba made public the new government on July 23. Besides former Prime Minister Eyeghe Ndong, three prominent PDG leaders - all from the predominant Fang ethnic group- were replaced; Mba Abessole, Oye Mba, and Mba Obame. Besides those that had resigned from the PDG, the Minister of Hydro-Energy and Minister for Small and Medium Enterprises stepped down and were replaced. Both ministers are expected to support independent candidates. Among the many ministers who retained their portfolios, Ali Bongo Ondimba, Minister of Defense and current PDG presidential candidate, retained his position. Pierre Moussavou, a declared presidential candidate and head of the PARI party in coalition with the PDG, was moved from Minister of Territorial Management to Minister of Technical Research and Professional Training.

MFA MEETS WITH DIPLOMATIC CORPS

18. (C) Minister of Foreign Affairs Paul Tongui convened a rare meeting with the diplomatic corps on July 21 to reassure the international community that Gabon remains committed to a peaceful transition of power. He also conveyed the appreciation of Interim President Rogombe for support from the international community for Gabon after the death of President Bongo. The meeting was also an opportunity for the Minister to present the dean and deputy of the corps with medals in recognition of their service. Tongui also noted that foreign missions will need to work closely with the Gabonese Government if they plan to send election observers.

COMMENT

19. (C) As opposed to the 2008 municipal elections in Gabon, the long voter registration lines at the municipal offices predict high participation in the upcoming election. Post has not verified the complaints regarding registration

irregularities, but they do underscore a general feeling of discontent by the Gabonese in regards to the rushed registration process. The figure of close to 900,000 possible registrants is also likely to lead to questions of irregularities. An estimated registration of 900,000 appears to be impossibly high for Gabon's population of 1.5 million. Di Ndinge's claim that he is resisting the calls for him to run appears to be an attempt to show PDG solidarity after the very public defections by other high-level personalities.

END COMMENT.

REDDICK